

Old Marshall House
Washington, Mason County, Kentucky

HABS No. 20-14
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 20

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
G. M. Grimes, District Officer
304 Martin Brown Building
Louisville, Kentucky

70-10-10...

Name of structure: Old Marshall House

Location: Washington, Mason County, Kentucky

Owner or
custodian: Miss Louis Marshall

Address: Washington, Mason County, Kentucky

Date built: 1800
(approx)

Architect
or builder:

Present
condition: Fair; needs repair. Exterior badly
settled in places; needs paint.

Number of
stories: Two stories and attic (finished); also
basement under (north side to
south wall of hall) part of house.

Material used
in construction: Foundation: Native stone.
Exterior walls: Solid brick.
Interior partitions: Brick and frame,
plastered.
Floors: Wood, random width ash;
basement: earth.
Roof: Frame construction, covered with
galvanized iron (recent).

Description: From The Register of the Kentucky
architectural Historical Society, September, 1909,
and historical page 46, follows:

"The old Marshall house on the hill is another place of note in Washington. It was built in 1800 by Captain Thomas Marshall, another brother of Chief Justice Marshall. The father and mother of Chief Justice Marshall lived and died here, and are buried in the family burying ground which lies adjacent to it, with many succeeding generations".

Capt. Thomas Marshall, born in Fauquier County, Virginia, October 27, 1761, was a Revolutionary soldier. Also the first Clerk of Shenandoah County, Virginia. He came to Kentucky in the fall of 1788, or spring of 1789; married in 1790. Was the first Clerk of Mason County and continued in that office until his death. He was a member from Mason County to the Second Constitutional Convention of Kentucky in 1799. He died at Washington, Mason County, Kentucky, March 19, 1817, and was buried in the family burying ground on the hill.

This building is a skeleton of what it must have been when originally built and is in a very bad state of repair. No modern conveniences are to be found in the house except electric lights and a warm air furnace, which were recently installed.

The kitchen ell was built first; perhaps as a part of some other structure occupying the present site, or it may have stood alone. It must have always been a kitchen, on account of the large fireplace, and it is much older than the remainder of the house.

The brick work of this portion is of stretcher bond, whereas the balance is Flemish bond, except the chimney on the north wall of the sitting room, where the brick are laid English bond. The window frames are different ~~than~~ from those in main body of house, again indicates the kitchen was built earlier.

The old kitchen fireplace, originally on the south wall, was turned around and used for the dining room when that part was built, the same chimney serving the fireplace in the bedroom over the dining room.

The original chimney for the sitting room was built inside, as the record drawings indicate, but was later rebuilt on outside to conform to the chimney serving the dining room fireplace making the two chimneys symmetrical with the gable.

The third step in the construction, the parlor with rooms over, was built about 1800. Here again no attempt was made on the rear wall to tooth the new brick work in to the old, but the front wall was carefully toothed together.

At the time the parlor was added a frame addition was built adjoining it, but was later torn down.

There is evidence on the east wall of the house to indicate the **existence** of a porch across this side which was replaced by the present porch.

The porch on the west side is not original, according to old Captain McKnight, a resident there. The building of this porch, changing front door, tripple opening on second floor, pediment, etc., were probably attempts to repair, or conceal, a very bad settlement that occurred in the **west** wall shortly after the house was completed.

Originally the roof was covered with yellow poplar shingles, hand split, some of which were discovered under the pediment on the west slope of roof, indicating that the pediment was not original but added over the top of the old roof.

The stairs ~~are~~ especially fine in every detail, particularly the newels which are all of slightly different design.

The parlor mantle was transported from the east over the mountains on mule back to grace its final location.

G. M. Grimes
Revised 1936, H.C.F.

MARSHALL HOUSE, WASHINGTON, KENTUCKY

March 26, 1934

(This Building is a skeleton of what it must have been when originally built. It is in a very bad state of repair, and it will be a pity if some means cannot be found to save it and restore it to its original condition. This building has no modern conveniences in it, save a warm air furnace heating the first floor hall, and electric light outlets have recently been installed in every room. In the 136 years since it was built, it has been added to, remodeled, repaired, and parts of it that were built years ago have been torn down.

In order that we may make the record drawings clear, as to what we intended to present, this chronological history of its building is written in the hope that it will emphasize and illustrate, once more, the fallacy of attempting to repair, add to, or otherwise improve the things that need no improvement. That man, of himself, or by himself, cannot improve them, without the aid of the same superior skill and leadership that put them there, as an enduring testimony of their painstaking effort and experience in the practice of a highly specialized art. These things are imperishable, and those that come after the original builders of such buildings should know their value, else, they should be required to let them alone.

When we went to measure this building the principal problem we had to solve was, what to take and what not? What part was original and, therefore, worthy to be taken, what part was modern, often added in a hap-hazard manner, in attempts to restore or conceal defects in the structural part of the house, often done in bad taste with poor workmanship and unsuitable materials, without thought of the Architectural problems involved. This was done over and over again, without attempting in anyway, to make the new work added, conform to the beautiful details, and refinements thereof, and already there, just waiting for someone to come along and copy, or improve them, if such were possible.

The question of what was the oldest part of this building was up for discussion very early in our activities, and from then on out, it was always present. It was worked out, step by step, until the last day, we made the greatest discovery of all, and it gave to us the exact knowledge, and then, and only then, we knew its history in chronological order. This knowledge was literally dug out of this building from evidence existing within it.

The Kitchen ell was built, first, perhaps as a part of some other structure occupying the present site, or it may have stood alone. It must have been always used as a Kitchen, on account of the large fireplace within it on the South side. It is much older

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than any other part of the house, or it seems to be. We reached this conclusion from the following evidence.

The parallelogram forming the Kitchen does not line up with the parallelogram forming the Sitting Room, Dining Room and central Hallway, as the plans will show. It is out of square with the other part of the house. Nothing like that condition can be found anywhere about this building, for, it was accurately laid out, built plumb, level and equare.

The floor of the Kitchen is 8 inches below the floor of the Dining Room. The Brick work is of stretcher running bond, no headers. The balance of the house is laid up with Flemish bond, except in the Sitting Room chimney, where the brick are laid English bond, with 4 courses of brick between the headers.

Here, of course, are three different types of brick work in the same house, and representing three different periods of construction.

There is a straight joint in the Brick work at the Weest side of the Kitchen, clearly visible, where same joins the walls of main house. No bond existing into walls of main house at this point.

The window and door details are entirely different from those of any other part of the house, although, the brick mould on the Kitchen frames, undoubtedly influenced the selection of this type of mould for the new work, when added.

There is an extra jamb of 9 inches at the door leading to the Dining Room, which extended through the original South wall of the Kitchen. The door to Dining Room is set in the new 9 inch brick wall which was built directly against the Kitchen wall, when the Dining Room was built.

The old Kitchen fire place, originally, on the South wall of Kitchen was turned around, and used from the Dining Room side. The chimney was continued up above same on the outside wall of the main house, serving the fire place in bed room over the Dining Room, as well.

It was at this time, no doubt, new flue for a stove was constructed for the Kitchen. It was located on the North side of same, and to save floor space, which was badly needed, it is supported by the roof framing. What more logical construction could have been used than to utilize this old Kitchen in this way, once it was decided to so use it.

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Formerly, the cooking, most likely, was done in the old fire place, and now, that the new house was to be, and stoves could be had, the old fire place was turned to a new use.

Then, too, it afforded the builders an opportunity of building a 9 inch wall directly against the old Kitchen wall, carrying the wall of second story of main house on top of both new and old walls. Elsewhere, the North wall is 17 inches thick.

That part of the building comprising the Sitting Room, Dining Room and central Hallway, and rooms over same, was built, according to Captain McKnight, in 1798. When this was built the Sitting Room chimney was built inside the house - see foundation plan.

Some time later, this chimney was torn down and re-built, including new foundation on the outside of the house, and made nearly to match the Dining Room chimney on the same wall, and is almost symmetrical in its location with the center of gable on this side.

There is no bond between this chimney and the main wall in either brick work or foundation, as a straight joint exists here.

The brick work of this chimney is very interesting, and is detailed on the drawings, consisting of regular bond with 4 stretchers in between the headers.

We account for this operation as follows. The Sitting Room was the general living room, even after the Parlor addition was built, and it is so used, of the house, today. This room in the early days of the house was constantly in use, and likewise, the fireplace. It is probable, that the flues were burned out, and, therefore, a new fire place and flues were necessary, and so, it was built, this time, on the outside.

When this addition was built, the South wall of the central Hallway was an outside wall, and there is a straight joint in this wall in the East wall of the main house, at the end of it, no attempt being made to bond the new brick work of the Parlor addition into it. In continuing the cornice at this point, for the Parlor addition, the builders did not remove the miter on same for the return at the South wall. They merely coped the new moulding to it.

At the corresponding point on the West wall, or front, the new Parlor wall has been very carefully "toothed" into the old work and this evidence is here.

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The Parlor and rooms over same were built in 1800, and at this time, a frame addition was built adjoining the Parlor on the South side, and this is indicated on the drawings, but has since been torn down.

Two window frames were taken out of the South wall of the Hallway and reset in new Parlor addition, one on first floor and one on second.

In the Parlor, there is an ornamental plaster cornice and center piece, which is so totally out of keeping with the Architectural treatment of the house, and although the photographs show it, we did not measure or include it in the record drawings, as we are certain it is modern, and not a part of the original house.

This brings us to a consideration of the Porches. There is a porch which extends entirely across the East side of the house. We did not take this, or detail it, as it was not a part of the original house. There is some evidence that some kind of a porch extended across this space, some openings in the East wall suggest joists, or rafters, here, but, this structure is not there now. There is an original brick terrace extending along the East wall and this we have shown on plan, and if the original porch were there, it evidently covered this terrace, or part of it.

The photograph of the West elevation shows a porch over the West or Main Entrance, which we were told by Captain McKnight, was formerly a two story porch, with a pediment. When the porch was remodeled into its present form, so we understand it, this pediment was reset on the main roof, in its present location.

The details of this porch, front door, triple opening over same, and the pediment, do not conform to the design of the house. The general treatment show them to be modern, not earlier than 1840. We are of the opinion there never was a porch here for many years after the house was built.

The building of this porch, changing front door, triple opening on second floor, pediment, etc. were probably attempts to repair, or conceal a very bad settlement that occurred in the East wall, shortly after the house was completed, extending from the South wall of central Hallway to the Northwest corner of the house. This settlement was of progressive and devastating character, being centralized at the North side of the Hallway, at which point, the first floor is 9 inches below the true level of this floor.

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This settlement destroyed much of the brick work of the front wall of Hallway, made the main cornice out of level, ruined the arch over original front door, devastated the entire area between the North and South walls of the Central Hallway, all of which has been replaced, requiring much patching, "humoring", or trying to equalize the differences in level existing here, or at least, partially conforming to these conditions. It is a mess.

The North jamb of the door went down pretty straight and is still there, intact, and plumb. No one knows what form the original porch had, except that it is reported to have been two stories high. It was torn down and re-built last summer into its present form, and constructed of 80 per cent of new material, and this is the structure shown on the Photograph.

The pediment on the roof was never a part of the original house, and was, we think, manufactured from bits of mouldings from the tearing down of the frame addition to South of Parlor.

Originally, the roof was covered with yellow Poplar shingles, hand shaved 18 1/2 inches long with rounded butts, and from 3 1/2 inches to 6 1/2 inches wide, and laid 6 inches to the weather. These shingles were laid on 1 inch x 3 inch Oak strips, hand sawed with whip saw, and spaced 6 inches on center. The shingles were nailed to these strips 13 inches from the butt, with one hand made wrought iron nail in each shingle. The original nailing strips on which the shingles are laid, and the original shingles are in place on the roof beneath the present pediment, that now adorns the front of the building, in only the triangular space formed by the two valleys of the pediment, which was set on top of the shingles. All other parts of the roof are covered with 1 inch thick Poplar sheathing in random width, and sheathed solid, some of the boards being as wide as 19 inches, but there are no original shingles on the roof, except as above.

The way we account for this condition is the following. When it was necessary to renew the original shingles, it was found so difficult to get the shingles off the nailing strips, it was decided to remove the nailing strips and shingles together, in one operation, then, re-sheath the roof with new sheathing, and this was done everywhere, except under the pediment. The roof has been renewed with several shingle roofs since that time, and is now covered with standing seam sheet steel roofing.

This work was done about 1840, the same period for which the porch, present front door, etc. corresponds, and checks closely with the efficient life of the superior shingle roof, and methods of laying, which had covered the roof for 42 years. At this time,

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also, the large opening between the Sitting room, and Dining room was cut, as the details correspond in character to this period.

There is a straight joint in the brick work at the North side of the present door, which would form the North jamb of a door centered on the original Hall, and which seems to be the only remaining portion of an arched opening, inasmuch as its top is about in line with what would be the spring-line of an arch. Had this not have been an arched opening this joint would, no doubt, have continued to a point somewhat higher and more closely in line with the head of nearby openings.

The reason the design of the main entrance door was chosen is based on the following facts. If an earthquake, as some say, or any settlement, did wreck the building materially (in 1800), or shortly afterwards, this North jamb to the height indicated, would naturally be the only remaining portion of brick work, inasmuch as the opening was so close to the corner of the building, and especially so since this area of brick work between the door and the corner would necessarily have to be removed in order to shift the door to its new position (in the center of the new building).

The interior panelling, which was present originally, clearly shows that a given area of certain amount was taken from one side and applied to the space on the other side, indicating that the width of the door has always remained constant, and which also indicates, there were no side lights.

While originally there was a window in both the first and second floors of the South wall of the Hall, these windows were blocked up or formed into door openings when the 1800 addition was added, leaving only what light that would filter from a window on the stair landing to light this Hall. Inasmuch as it was not customary, at this time, to place lights in the door itself, a transom repeating the line of the arch and divided into fan design contemporaneous with other work, seems to have been the only logical means of admitting light to the front part of this Hall.

When a close study is made of the main cornice, stairway, and other interior details, it is impossible to conceive that the same mind that created these features could possibly have been content to do less than design an entrance door consisting of a panelled jamb embellished with either engaged columns or pilasters supporting a delicate pediment, in keeping with the main cornice. The study of any contemporaneous work of the Eastern Seaboard reveals that when a house of this character having a molded brick course near the first floor line and a projecting brick course near the second floor line has almost without exception such a pedimented door, as shown.

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The main cornice extended straight across in an unbroken line for the full width of the house, as shown on the record drawings, with one window in the center over the contemporary doorway, which completes the restoration, as we believe it existed on completion of the building in A.D. 1800.

Special mention for the solution of the problems involved, and as above presented, is due Mr. Chester H. Disque, one of the members of the Squad, for his enthusiastic interest and knowledge of the early American styles of Architecture. Also, to Mr. L. H. Wilson, whose wide experience of many years, as a builder, before engaging in the practice of Architecture, was responsible for accounting for many of the curious and interesting operations that occurred in this house in the course of its construction.

These matters were under discussion immediately on our arrival at the building, and continued throughout the operation of measuring it. On the last day, the information was gained about the pediment and original shingle roof.

Then, we called a meeting of the entire Squad. The question of what was the original design of the house, when completed in 1800, was thoroughly discussed, and finally, it was the unanimous decision of the Squad, to present the record drawings, as now constituted, as being the only rational and logical solution of this question.

We might add the story of how the Parlor mantel was conveyed on the back of a mule over the Eastern mountains, to grace its final location, how the compo ornament on it representing the month of March, coming in like a lion and going out like a lamb, was discovered. How the story of "Mezappa" was cast into the fire place frame in the (old office), and speculate, if we will, as to who made it and how, or whether it was made in this Country, or imported, and by whom?

Some of these things will never be known; sufficient, however, to say, they are there, and recorded for future generations to discover. They cannot help but admire them. They represent "Holy Ground", and will always be approached with awe and reverence, by those who appreciate them.

By B.T. Wicshall

approved G.M. Grimes

Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.

Addendum to:

Thomas Marshall House
U.S. Highway 68
Washington
Mason County
Kentucky

HABS No. KY-20-14

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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